

Finance and Personnel Directorate Corporate Report 1999-2002

The Directorate has four parts – the Personnel Office, the Finance Office, the Recruitment Office and the Registry. The purpose of the Directorate is to provide personnel support for Members and the Secretariat from recruitment to pensions and including financial and accounting systems and the provision of stationery, filing systems and reprographic services.

Personnel Office

FUNCTION

The purpose of the Personnel Office is to provide a high-quality, customer-focused service with the development, implementation and administration of a wide range of personnel functions on behalf of Assembly Members, their support staff and the Secretariat staff.

The Personnel Office is responsible for paying salaries to Secretariat staff and Members. It is also responsible for administering the Members' Pension Scheme and the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme for Secretariat staff.

The Personnel Office provides a service for Members as it pays salaries to their support staff on their behalf and contributions to independent pension providers in respect of personal pension plans arranged by individual members of the support staff.

As well as salary and pension payments for the Secretariat staff etc the Personnel Office is responsible for developing and implementing personnel policies arising from terms and conditions of employment. These include the administration of the staff appraisal system, including probationary

assessments; the provision of equal opportunities advice and guidance; the administration and maintenance of the further education and external training system; the monitoring of sick absence and subsequent action where appropriate; the administration of the Assembly's childcare scheme and the provision of the Assembly's travel service. The Personnel Office has developed and delivers the Assembly induction programme and looks after the recruitment of temporary staff.

ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

To deliver the services required to Assembly Members and Secretariat staff etc a number of priority tasks were identified and taken forward as a matter of urgency. These priorities included the purchase and development of a computerised payroll system; the development and implementation of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (NI) 2000; the development and delivery of an Assembly induction programme; the initial provision and administration of IT training for Members and staff throughout the Secretariat; and the development of an efficient and effective travel service for Assembly Members and Secretariat staff.

All of these tasks were completed during the period of this report.

THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

- Ensure the smooth transition of the service provided by the Personnel Office from the current Assembly to its successor following the next Assembly election;
- The development of procedures to deal with absenteeism within the Assembly Secretariat;
- The development and implementation of

Assembly Terms and Conditions and the production of a Staff Handbook; and

- The development of an Assembly Pay and Grading structure.

Finance Office

FUNCTION

The purpose of the Finance Office is to obtain for the Assembly the resources it needs; to approve and control the use of funds made available; to maintain proper accounts of the Assembly's financial activities; and to promote effectiveness and efficiency in all the Assembly's operations.

The Finance Office is responsible for the payment of allowances to Members and Secretariat staff and the reimbursement of all legitimate creditors. All payments must be made within a thirty day limit, though the Office strives for a much shorter timescale. The Office provides support and advice to Members, Directorates and Assembly staff on all financial matters. To help with financial control, Directors and budget holders are supplied with regular information on expenditure within their areas of responsibility.

ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

The main challenge during the period was to implement a new payment and financial management system within the Assembly. The system was successfully implemented, including the introduction of resource accounting. Some progress has also been made with resource budgeting.

THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

- Delivery of high quality financial services to Members, the Commission and the Assembly secretariat;
- Preparation of Guidance for Members and their staff after the 2003 elections including those Members not returning, returning Members and new Members; and
- Carry out a review of the existing financial systems to identify improvements to the provision

of financial information including the development of on-line access to financial reports and information as appropriate.

Recruitment Office

Perhaps the biggest challenge faced by the Directorate has been recruitment. The Assembly Commission is committed to public advertisement for all vacancies and the role of the Recruitment Office is to select, through fair and open competition and on the basis of merit, the most suitable staff for appointment by the Assembly Commission.

The Recruitment Office is responsible, on behalf of the Assembly Commission, for advertising all vacant posts and carrying out all procedures necessary to effect the appointment of staff to the Assembly Secretariat. Appointments, following open competition, are either permanent positions or secondments from a current employer. In undertaking its role, the Recruitment Office strives for continuous improvement in customer service and recruitment practices; maintains standards of probity and integrity in handling candidates' applications for employment; and ensures that all policies and procedures are consistent with current employment law and Northern Ireland equality codes of practice.

ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

To meet the Commission's requirements, the Recruitment Office needed to develop, implement and manage an effective staffing and recruitment strategy. This involved having in place all necessary selection and appointment arrangements to permit the public advertising of posts as soon as possible following devolution. All recruitment policies and procedures adopted by the Assembly Commission had, of course, to be consistent with current employment law.

During the period of this report, 28 recruitment competitions were run on behalf of the Assembly Commission for a varied range of posts from the Clerk to the Assembly to clerical supervisors and

clerical officers. During the period December 1999 to March 2002, over 7,000 application forms were issued in response to the advertisements, 3,500 applications were processed and 211 appointments made.

A range of robust selection procedures was adopted by the Assembly Commission and covered issues such as advertising policy for all Assembly vacancies, including the promotion of the Commission's commitment to equality of opportunity; the need for all selection panel members to be appropriately trained and to be equipped with the skills necessary to participate effectively as a panel member; and the use of application forms which sought only information relevant to the assessment of candidates against the criteria specified for the job.

The Commission considered it important to ensure that any pre-appointment checks were job-related and consistent with the need to comply with current legislation. In the Commission's view, the checks now in place comprise an appropriate level of scrutiny of candidates' health and criminal records.

THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

The newly formed Recruitment Office of the Northern Ireland Assembly is to embark on a rigorous recruitment campaign to fill vacancies arising through natural wastage, and other vacancies arising from the increasing business needs of the Assembly.

The Recruitment Office has produced a business plan in which:

- Approximately 45 competitions are scheduled for advertisement during the period April 2002 to around June 2003.
- It is anticipated that during that period, the Assembly will appoint around 200 plus staff.
- Vacancies to be filled include at the higher and management levels, Director posts through to Assembly Clerks, Assistant Assembly Clerks and office managers.
- Additionally, there are other high volume competitions scheduled such as finance clerical officer and finance clerical supervisor, and to fill vacancies arising within the Information Technology and security related areas.

Registry

FUNCTION

The purpose of the Registry Office is to provide office stationery etc, to look after postal arrangements for outgoing mail, especially for Members, to ensure that reprographic services are serviced and working and to provide a filing system for the Assembly Secretariat.

ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

When the Assembly was first elected in 1998, the initial priority of the Registry Office was to provide stationery and photocopying facilities for Members and the Secretariat as quickly as possible. The emphasis has now moved towards longer term solutions leading to the development of more sophisticated systems of control and statistical record keeping.

Arrangements have been put in place to use the Government Purchasing Agency's EROS computerised ordering system to order stationery from contracted suppliers. A stock level control system has been set up within the Registry Office, and separate stationery ordering systems have been introduced for Members, parties and constituency offices. Arrangements have also been put in place for delivering stationery to constituency offices.

A reprographics policy has been implemented to provide a range of photocopiers for use by Members, parties and the various offices of the Secretariat.

A computerised file record system for the Assembly has been set up following guidelines laid down by the Public Records Office.

A staff newsletter, Assembly Lines', has been introduced and is currently published on a quarterly basis.

THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

- The development of an efficient File Storage System.
- To ensure the smooth transition of the services provided by Registry from the present Assembly to its successor.